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LETTER DATED 8 JUNE 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit a summary of a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia concerning a second air strike, on 5 June 1998, by the Asmara authorities against civilian targets including schools, in the city of Makelle, capital of the Tigray regional state of Ethiopia. I also have the honour to attach a press statement by Mr. Seyoum Mesfin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia and head of the delegation of Ethiopia to the sixty-eighth session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity, held in Ouagadougou.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate this letter and its annexes as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex I

Press release issued by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia on 6 June 1998

On 5 June 1998, at about 5 p.m., the Eritrean authorities carried out a second air raid against the Ethiopian city of Makelle, striking civilian areas twice, including an elementary school. The casualties of this barbaric action were 44 killed and 135 wounded, among them children. This premeditated air strike was clearly aimed at unleashing terror among the civilian population since bombs were dropped twice, the first on the school and the second on a crowd assisting victims.

The Eritrean authorities provoked those hostilities when they occupied Ethiopian territory and rejected a recommendation proposed by the facilitators, who have attempted to defuse the tensions triggered by Eritrean aggression. One of the key elements of the proposal by the United States of America and Rwanda, supported by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity, meeting in Ouagadougou, calls for the withdrawal of Eritrean invading forces from Ethiopian territory, the demilitarization of the entire common border between the two countries and peaceful negotiations on rival territorial claims. Ethiopia has accepted the recommendation in full, while the Eritrean authorities talk about demilitarization in vague language and have opted for aggression, which drags Ethiopia into a situation of hostilities with consequences that are certain to be more disastrous for them.

When this uncivilized act was initiated by the authorities in Asmara, Ethiopia ordered the Eritrean Embassy in Addis Ababa to limit the number of its diplomatic staff to three and to make sure that the rest left Ethiopia by Sunday, 7 June 1998, at noon. The order was served on 5 June 1998, giving the Eritreans 48 hours to comply.

Annex II

Press statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia and Head of the Ethiopian delegation to the sixty-eighth session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity issued on 6 June 1998

Ethiopia views with pride and admiration the role of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, its endeavour to free Africa from the scourge of conflicts and its tireless effort to bring about peace and stability on the continent.

It is to be recalled that the Central Organ and the Council of Ministers convened special sessions on 4 and 5 June 1998 consecutively to discuss the conflict that has erupted between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The concern demonstrated and the efforts made to come up with a viable recommendation during those two sessions have clearly demonstrated Africa's high sense of responsibility and its determination to resolve all conflicts on our continent by peaceful means. At the same time, we view with deep regret the anguish and pain that this has created for the member States of OAU. The fact is that this is a conflict imposed on Ethiopia as a result of Eritrea's naked aggression on our territory.

At its special session the Council, after a lengthy discussion on the matter, adopted a constructive resolution and launched an appeal that calls upon both parties simultaneously to put an end to all hostilities and to accept and implement the recommendations of the facilitators. The Ethiopian delegation to the special session has accepted this noble call with appreciation and full commitment. At the same time, on 4 June 1998, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia announced that it had fully endorsed and accepted the package of recommendations made by the facilitators. Those recommendations, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia believes, go far beyond a ceasefire and serve as a basis to bring about a lasting solution to the border dispute.

The Eritrean Government, however, has continued its provocations and has rejected the package of recommendations. Furthermore, it has opted to escalate the conflict to a full-scale war, the consequences of which it has to bear full responsibility.

Presently, the ball is clearly and squarely in the court of the Eritrean Government. If it is committed to peace it is imperative that the Eritrean Government accept the package of recommendations of the facilitators and unequivocally heed the appeal launched by the Council of Ministers of OAU.

The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, therefore, urges the member States of OAU and the international community at large to prevail upon the Government of Eritrea to end its intransigent position and demonstrate its readiness to resolve the conflict through peaceful means by immediately and unconditionally accepting the recommendations of the facilitators.